DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 501

EA 030 760

TITLE	School Matters: Images for Reflecting and Planning.
INSTITUTION	Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Lab. at Brown Univ., Providence, RI.; RMC Research Corp., Portsmouth, NH.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	13p.
CONTRACT	RJ96006401
AVAILABLE FROM	LAB at Brown University, The Education Alliance, 222 Richmond Street, Suite 300, Providence, RI 02903-4226. Tel: 800-521-9550 (Toll Free).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Assessment; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; *Long Range Planning; Strategic Planning

ABSTRACT

This document describes ways to facilitate reflection and planning in challenging areas of school reform. It outlines a process, "image-making," that is based on research conducted with high-poverty schools that made substantial reforms over time. Image-making helps initiate thoughtful dialogue among adults in the school community by using metaphors and visual images to bring to the forefront and make visible those experiences, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that often have no forum for expression and dialogue. Such reflection can help group members understand how different members of the school community perceive important aspects of a school and can provide the language for talking about sensitive issues that people might not feel free to discuss. The guidelines include questions to help a community determine whether it is ready for such reflection and to offer detailed tips on preparing for small-group discussion. A seven-step imaging process is described that includes an overview, laying the ground rules, posing the question and creating the individual images, sharing images within the small group, creating the group images, wrapping up group image discussion, and identifying impacts on the school. An appendix provides three examples of how creating a group image can unfold. (RJM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 448 501

SCHOOL MATTERS

IMAGES FOR REFLECTING AND PLANNING

The image-making process is designed to facilitate reflections and planning about especially challenging areas of school reform. Through the process, participants generate images and metaphors and apply them to difficult issues in their own school situations. The process is based on research conducted by the LAB with high-poverty schools that had made substantial reforms over time. The research identified ten capacities that are important for initiating and sustaining meaningful changes (see *What it Takes: Ten Capacities for Initiating and Sustaining School Improvement* for more information about the ten capacities).

The image-making process is a starting place for creating a thoughtful dialogue among adults in the school community who may hold diverse perspectives about three of those capacities:

1. Building consensus about the school's evolving culture;
2. Strengthening positive attitudes and expectations about the school's students and their parents; and
3. Increasing the quality and energy of interactions among members of the school community.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

LAB Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory
a program of The Education Alliance At Brown University
RMC *in partnership with* RMC Research Corporation

EA 030760

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Because the three capacities relate directly to the beliefs and attitudes of members of the school community, they can be difficult for a diverse group to talk about and further develop. The image-making process is a way to both encourage reflection about the ways in which different people are currently making sense of the school environment, and also enable a group to discuss changes they would like to see develop in these sensitive areas.

The process employs both metaphors and visual images to bring to the forefront and make visible those experiences, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that often have no forum for expression and dialogue.
The image-making process is especially useful for discussing topics around which feelings are likely to be quite powerful and opinions are varied. An example might be the differences of opinion between teachers who are actively engaged with parents and those who are not comfortable with parent involvement; another could be the differences between those parents and teachers who are strong advocates of retaining students until certain standards are met and those who fear that retention is harmful to students.

Reflection and action planning using image-making can

- help group members understand how different members of the school community currently perceive important aspects of a school;
- provide the language for talking about sensitive issues that people might not have felt free to talk about;
- uncover information about the types of strategies that have both fostered and inhibited the development of a strong school culture; and
- provide some ideas about how to reconceptualize issues, build consensus, and identify ways to move forward.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Image-making is a multi-step process. Images are created and discussed by individuals and in small groups. Following this, the group analyzes the meaning and implications of the insights that have been offered and makes decisions about potential next steps to preserve, modify, or redesign current school conditions.

If you are wondering whether this would be a good planning technique for your school, consider the list of questions below. If the answer is "yes" to any of the questions, your school team might benefit from use of the image-making process:

1. Is the school on the verge of major changes and ready to move forward?
2. Is the school in the middle of major changes and needs to take stock?
3. Do teachers talk about being burned out?
4. If you asked people to describe the mission of your school, would you get ten different answers?
5. Do you feel that you have been working hard on reforms but not seeing progress?
6. Are there obvious camps among faculty or among parents?

Some examples of how you might develop a focus from responses to the questions:

If the answer to questions 1 or 2 is "yes,"
you might use the process to focus on understanding different perspectives about the school's past patterns of change.

If the answer to questions 3 or 4 is "yes,"
consider a focus on the interactions among adults in the school community.

If the answer to questions 5 or 6 is "yes,"
think about a focus on how faculty view the students and community.

Participants may include representatives from the full school community, including teachers, administrators, parents, support staff, students, and community members who are closely involved with the operations of the school.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PREPARATION

Participants

5-25 Participants. Involve a variety of people with perspectives on the school. An alternative is to conduct several image-making sessions with different groups over time in order to include more perspectives. For part of the process, participants will work in small groups that can be divided in different ways, typically beginning with groups in which people are likely to hold somewhat common perspectives. Decisions about groups depend on the context of the school, but might suggest groupings by grade, experience, philosophy of instruction, etc.

1 Facilitator. The facilitator could either be an individual from outside the school community or an internal staff member. The facilitator will need to be able to encourage multiple viewpoints, handle disagreements and strong points of view, and be willing to probe beneath surface responses to uncover attitudes and beliefs.

Materials Needed for Image-Making Process

Large paper (several sheets for each participant and each small group)

Colored markers and colored pencils

Masking tape or clips to display paper for discussion

Flip-chart for note-taking

Room Set-up

Ideally, participants would be at tables with ample drawing space. Alternatively, they might sit in groups at small tables but have other tables in the room that allow for drawing. Extra flip-chart stands can also be helpful for drawing. The tables where participants sit should accommodate each person's participation in drawing tasks.

THE IMAGE PROCESS

The Image Process has seven steps in which participants create images of their school's culture, processes, or structure that act as metaphors for discussing the school's current reality. The seven steps provide the facilitator instructions on how to set up, lead, and wrap up the image process.

Step 1: Overview of Image Process (10 minutes)

Introduce the purpose of the image process, generating images from the variety of perspectives in the school community, including internal school personnel and external community members, as a method for discussing the school.

Distribute drawing materials to each participant (for use in Step 4).

Step 2: Laying the Ground Rules (5 minutes)

Establish rules for the process that will facilitate maximum discussion and creative thinking. Ask each person to listen fully to others and not interrupt. Remind participants that each person's views are important and that the purpose of the image process is to gather a full range of perspectives about the school. Make sure that everyone participates and is heard. Encourage multiple perspectives and ideas. Have participants ask each other clarifying questions as necessary as they work through Steps 4 and 5, but remind them not to challenge or argue with another person's image or explanation of that image.

Step 3: Posing the Question and Creating the Individual Images (15 minutes to create individual image)

Pose a question that asks participants to create an image. A generic structure for the question could be "How do you see X?" For instance, if you want to discuss your school's culture, you could pose the questions, "How would you describe the essence of what the school does for its students? What is special about the culture of the school compared to other schools in the district?"

Ask each participant to create a picture or image based on his or her experiences with the school or organization. Remind participants that the purpose is to get an image on paper, not to create a "work of art." Some participants will choose to draw an image in detail; for others, some general form of representation is fine.

One method for facilitating the image creation is to suggest to participants a category of images, such as animals, transportation, nature, or cooking and food, from which to design their image.

Examples:

Category: Animals	**Image created:** picture of "holding tiger by the tail"
Category: Transportation	**Image created:** picture of "high-speed train"
Category: Nature	**Image created:** picture of "floral garden"

Step 4: Sharing Images within Small Group
(No more than 20 minutes for presentation of images in small group)

Ask participants to break into small groups of approximately four to six people. The small groups can be sorted by

- role in the school (administrators, teachers, students, support staff, etc.);
- grade or subject area;
- length of time associated with the school (less than two years, two to five years, five to ten years, etc.); or
- by team or group structures currently operating in the school (leadership teams, task forces, committees, etc.).

Or participants can self-select into small groups of a reasonable size.

Have each participant present his or her image to his or her small group with a brief explanation of what the image signifies to him or her about the school or organization. Each person should take no more than two to three minutes to present his or her image; keep the presentations focused and flowing.

Step 5: Creating the Group Images
(20 minutes to create image, no more than 30-40 minutes for presentation of images to large group)

Ask participants in the small groups to explore the commonalities and differences of the individual images that they created. Remind them to look for commonalities among themes, issues, events, and characteristics of the school or organization that are represented by their individual images, as well as the differences.

Next, ask each small group to create a "group image" that captures the commonalities among their individual images. If the group decides that a single image is not possible, have them develop a combination of images that fully represents their answer to the question posed in Step 3.

Note: The group image may be a completely different image from that of any of the individual participants. The group image should draw on their collective insights.

Have each group choose a spokesperson to present their group image.

Finally, have each small group present their "group image" to all participants. Ask all participants to take notes about the group images, especially noting the commonalities and differences among themes, issues, events, or characteristics of the school represented in the group images. Allow approximately five minutes for each group to present their image. See illustrative examples of group images in the Appendix on pages 10 through 12.

Step 6: Wrapping Up Group Image Discussion (30 minutes)

Conclude the discussion of the group images by posing the question, "What have we learned about X?" For instance, if you have discussed your school's culture, you could pose the question, "What have learned about our school based on the images created today?"

Ask each participant, using his or her notes from Step 5, to share any insights that he or she has gained from the discussion. Questions to pose to guide the discussion include

- What are the organizational themes behind the images, metaphors, and words used to describe them?
- What is the range of experiences and understanding conveyed? Are there wide variations in perspective or is there a relatively common perspective among the participants? What seems to account for this?
- What do we see as our strengths? What is missing, or what are our weaknesses?
- What common adjectives or metaphors would best describe us as a school or organization?
- Overall, what have we learned about ourselves?
- Do we need to do anything with what we have learned?

Ask participants for themes they observe from the comments. Identify themes upon which all participants agree. Pay special attention to the words, phrases, and metaphors participants use and record these on chart paper.

At the end of Step 6, participants should have an enhanced understanding of how different members of the school community currently perceive important aspects of their school. If there are time constraints, the facilitator may choose to split the image-making process into two sessions. Concluding Session 1 with Step 6 is the best option.

Step 7 is designed to help participants uncover information about factors affecting the school's culture, and build common understandings about how to move forward as a school. This step can immediately follow Step 6 or it can be used in a subsequent discussion session. Depending on the stage of development of reform, some groups may need to dig more deeply into the background of current actions, policies, and behaviors.

Step 7: Identifying Impacts on the School (90 minutes)

Introduce the purpose of Step 7 as an activity that will identify and explore internal and external factors affecting the school, and provide ideas about ways to re-conceptualize issues facing the school, build common understanding, and move forward.

Select a theme generated during the Step 6 activity that participants consider the most significant to them, or about which there is most curiosity. This selection may be achieved by consensus, voting, or some other selection technique.

Ask participants to work in small groups of approximately five to eight people to identify the activities, practices, policies, organizations, persons, and influences within the school and external to the school that contribute to the theme. These factors may have a positive or negative impact on the school. Allow 20 minutes for group discussion and 10 minutes for reporting out. Record responses on chart paper.

Ask each group to review the factors that strongly impact the school and that influence the image or theme and report out a few examples. Allow 15 minutes for reporting out and discussion.

While remaining in their small groups, ask participants to respond to the following questions, with each small group recording their responses on flip-chart paper. Allow 30 minutes for small group discussion and 15 minutes for reporting out. Record group reporting out responses on chart paper.

- What behaviors, activities, and practices that we just identified do we wish to keep and support because they respect who we are at our best?
- What behaviors, activities, and practices should we stop doing because they detract from who we are at our best?
- What behaviors, activities, and practices should we start doing because they would enhance our image of who we are at our best?

Using the group notes, create a brief composite list. Note that brevity of the list is important, particularly the lists of what should be stopped and started. A long list will be unlikely to be followed and will also be impossible to monitor.

Use the list to inform your school's planning committee(s) action plans, either for the school as a whole, or for individuals to whom it applies. It is best to develop a custom-designed plan that uses the data as an initial diagnosis to set the stage for identifying what is hindering a compelling "picture" of the school from emerging and the school community from responding accordingly.

Remember that if these are the first conversations that the school community has had about these issues, it will take time and perhaps multiple sessions to work together effectively.

APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF STEP 5

Example 1: ***Different sub-groups within an organization may have similar experiences of the organization and hold consistent images of its culture.***

Participants in Group A—school staff and parents—developed individual images of their school using the category of transportation. The resulting images of the school were a luxury car at a crossroads; an airplane flying over an airport with a sign that says "closed"; a high-speed train loaded with people, sitting in the station; and a high-tech mountain bike speeding out of control down a hill. When the group reviewed the images, they found common themes across the images: movement that does not seem to lead in positive directions, or lack of movement; high-quality, high-tech vehicles; and unclear destinations for the vehicles. In contrasting the images, the participants saw differences in the level of speed or sophistication of the modes of transportation and in the number of people involved able to be transported by the vehicles.

The group discussed that they all saw their school as being reasonably "equipped" to serve its students. The school has well-maintained facilities and equipment, and a stable, committed staff. Many projects are being implemented at the school and most staff are involved in staff development, but the school lacks common goals and a clear sense of direction for its future. Based on these common themes, Group A developed a group image of a race car with a pit crew, but no finish line on the

circular track. The group is now looking at ways to enhance school planning, implementation, and evaluation so that all staff understand the school's goals and work towards these goals, making the most of the expertise and commitment of staff.

Example 2: ***Different sub-groups within an organization may have very different experiences of the organization and consequently hold very different images. For example, parents may have different feelings from staff, students may have different feelings from teachers, and staff with seniority may have different feelings from those who are more recently hired. This exercise is an excellent one for identifying and exploring those differences in a positive manner.***

Group B of teachers and parents participated in the image-making activity in a school in which there was no well-established parent group despite efforts on the part of school staff to encourage or create such a group. Small groups were formed so that parents and teachers first met separately. A series of different images emerged from the small groups. The facilitator noticed a difference in tone between those coming from parents and those from teachers, and so listed themes from the two sub-groups on different sheets. Those from teachers included the following: business-like, academic, open-door, lively, and high expectations. The facilitator helped the sub-group to identify an animal that represented these characteristics and the teachers settled on a badger. Parents, on the other hand, offered a list that included elevated, cold, pressure, uncomfortable, judgmental, energetic, demanding, and business-like. They selected a tiger as the image that characterized the school culture.

The group as a whole was able to understand that sub-groups' experiences of the organization were very different. Using the images and themes, they then identified and explored specific behaviors that contributed to these experiences. Together they were able to identify some steps to tame the tiger and to give the badger some more welcoming qualities so that parents could also identify with and support the school culture and practice.

Example 3: ***Different sub-groups of an organization may have very different experiences of the organization but through discussion they can develop a group image that reflects these experiences.***

Participants in Group C—school staff and parents—developed individual images of their school using the category of vegetables and food. The resulting images of the school were a vegetable garden untended and overgrown with weeds; a wide variety of fresh lettuces in a basket; fancy plates with different vegetable combinations on each; and a family dinner in which the adults are eating vegetables and the children, having refused vegetables, are eating marshmallows. When the group reviewed the images they found common themes across the images, including that there is "abundance" of resources and that "potential" exists in each visual image. Different themes across the images included the variety of "nourishment" for the school and different levels of attention paid to "nurturing" the school.

The group discussed the different points of view represented in the images and could see that some people focused on the variety, flexibility, and individuality afforded the teachers in the school. Others focused on the lack of tending or nurturing and the problems that could ensue as a result. There is a lot of freedom in the school, which some view as too chaotic. It is not clear that there is a common "meal" planned that would meet everyone's needs well. They developed a common group image of a Thanksgiving dinner with many people, many foods, and many things going on. Some of the people at the dinner are very happy and some are upset.

This publication is based on work sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under Contract Number RJ96006401. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the U.S. Department of Education, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

LAB

The LAB At Brown University
The Education Alliance
222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903-4226

Phone: 800.521.9550
Fax: 401.421.7650
E-mail: info@lab.brown.edu
Web: www.lab.brown.edu